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## DEALING WITH GRIEF IN COLLEGE

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By Angela Lustyk



As a college student, there is never a "convenient" time to process grief when you're already overwhelmed with a busy schedule and many responsibilities. Grieving the loss of someone or something important is a tough part of life that many of us will have to face at some point.

Sometimes you are able to prepare before the loss takes place, and other times you are completely blindsided. Taking time to understand what has happened and processing your emotions is so important. I have dealt with the loss of three family members within three semesters of attending Northwest University, and it was hard to take off the time I needed to deal with my loss while also staying on top of school.

I remember waking up this past Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend to the heart-shattering sobs of my mother at 4:00 in the morning. My sister and I rushed out of our rooms to find my mom standing by her own mother's bedside, telling us that Grandma Maria had passed away. We knew that Grandma's health had been declining for weeks and that the time was coming soon. But that didn't make it any less heartbreaking when it finally happened. This woman had taken care of me and helped raise me since I was 3 years old – and now she was gone.

I knew she was in a better place with Jesus, where she had longed to be. Those of us who were left on Earth, however, felt only sorrow.

I didn't believe that things could get any worse when the very next day in the early hours of the morning, I woke to my mother's heart-shattering sobs a second time. She told us that my other Grandma Nadia had passed away. My family just stood in the upstairs hallway in disbelief, breaking down into tears. My mom asked me to inform the rest of our siblings what had happened for the second day in a row.

When I told my siblings, my sister Elena responded with, "This is a joke, right?"

I wished that I was joking, but I wasn't. Although Grandma Nadia had been dealing with the pre-stages of blood cancer with a low immune system and feeling very ill the past few days, we all believed that she would soon get better and go back to her chatty, humorous self. Grandma Nadia had missed her daughter immensely, who passed away last February from breast cancer, and had told us she was ready to go and be with the Lord. But we didn't think it would happen so soon.

I was left dealing with many powerful emotions the week both my grandmothers passed away. At first I was angry. I had texted one of my best friends that all I wanted to do was buy some ceramic plates and throw them against a wall. How could God let this happen and take both my grandmothers away at the same time? But then people heard what had happened to our family, and the support and prayers began to overflow.

That's when peace started coming into the hearts of our family. People sent me kind words, and friends brought us food and groceries to get by. Family came to visit and stay with us for the first two weeks after the deaths, leaving us no time to feel lonely.

My professors were understanding that I had to miss some of my classes, and also prayed for me. It is a blessing to go to a Christian university where your professors are supportive and praying for you. When I came back to class, I felt support from my peers and

university where your professors are supportive and praying for you. When I came back to class, I got support from my peers and professors. Being able to let my emotions out at Pursuit through worship helped a lot.

Last week was the first week that my family truly went back to the normal schedule of work, school, and other responsibilities. I didn't expect the loneliness to hit as hard as it did. It left my heart aching. I wouldn't cry at home; I'd cry on the commute to school with the comfort of my music. My grandmothers had always been there, blessing me out the door every day and greeting me when I had come home, but now they were gone. Now the house was quieter and felt empty, even though it wasn't.

Dealing with grief is hard, and many go through the process differently. Grief isn't just about dealing with a death of a loved one. It can mean losing a friendship, relationship, or something else that you held valuable. You might go through different stages of denial, anger, sadness, loneliness, or numbness. You don't always have the option of taking off as much time as you need to grieve – and if we are honest with ourselves, dealing with a loss can sometimes last a lifetime.

Yet the grief does get easier with time, especially when you find ways to cope with it. For me, spending time with my family and friends really helped me not to feel lonely. I also dove into the word of God and found comfort in the Lord. One of my friends had called me and told me to read the book of Ecclesiastes, which talks about how there is a season and time for everything in Heaven.

If you find yourself grieving, a good way to channel your emotions is into your own creative outlets. For me, that was taking pictures, writing, and singing. It's not good to ignore the pain that you are feeling, but rather to embrace it.

I'm so thankful for everyone that was there for me and my family during these rough couple of weeks. I know that my grandmothers are happier now with the Lord. They were always praying for me and raising me to be a child of God, and I am forever grateful. Although I will miss them both terribly, I have accepted what has happened.

It is definitely not easy dealing with grief while in college because you still have to juggle school at the end of the day. Yet although grief is a season that is difficult to deal with and doesn't come at the most convenient time, there is a way to get through it.